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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0930  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0129  
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MORE STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the July 13 Cabinet of Ministers meeting, President Berdimuhamedov announced an important decision to recognize foreign educational degrees and appointed a new, possibly more dynamic and open Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers for culture and all newsmedia. Even though engrained attitudes may recede slowly, both steps signal a top-level desire for positive change. END SUMMARY.

?WE NEED OUR GUYS AND GIRLS? (WITH FOREIGN DEGREES)

13. (U) During the televised Cabinet of Ministers meeting, President Berdimuhamedov complained that Turkmenistan has ?five thousand? citizens studying abroad independently of government programs, but that their degrees are not recognized in Turkmenistan. He sternly explained, ?We need our guys and girls [sic], and we should use them for our industries. I was told that they return and are not able to find jobs and have to wander, or work somewhere in a firm, or as drivers or mechanics. Why do we do that? Why do we allow that? They are our own guys and girls. They are from our country.? After a lengthy complaint about the situation, the President instructed Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers Hydyr Saparlyev, responsible for education, to find a way to recognize degrees from ?CIS countries and other countries.?

RESHUFFLING OF DUTIES FOR CULTURE AND NEWSMEDIA

14. (U) Earlier in the same meeting, the President, appointed Maisa Yazmuhammedova to become a new Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers responsible for culture and newsmedia. In doing so, he fulfilled his earlier promise to establish a distinct Deputy Chair for these duties, and transferred culture from Deputy Chair

Saparlyev and apparently the newsmedia duties from the Presidential Press Secretary.

BIO NOTES FOR THE NEW DEPUTY CHAIRWOMAN

¶5. (U) Since February 2007, Maisa Merdovna Yazmuhammedova has served as the Chair of both the National Center of Trade Unions and Central Council of the Women's Union. October 2005-February 2007, she was Deputy Hakim (governor) of Ahal Welayat (province), responsible for education, culture, healthcare, and sports. Her earlier positions were in educational programs for various schools. She is a 1994 graduate of the Azadi World Languages Institute with a degree in Russian. Muhammedova was born in 1971.

¶6. (SBU) Maisa Yazmuhammedova is known to the embassy through the welayat reporting program during her tenure as the Ahal Welayat Deputy Hakim. After making an elections visit to Ahal in February, PAO noted Yazmuhammedova's depth of knowledge, receptiveness, openness, and encouragement of input from her electoral commission. Voting districts under her supervision were highlighted to visiting foreign journalists on the day of the presidential election.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Berdimuhammedov's decision on foreign educational degrees signals an important new step for the country as well as for U.S. government exchange programs. Many alumni of U.S. programs have been able to find work only with foreign companies or international organizations. While it may take time for ingrained attitudes against foreign degrees to subside, this step is concrete evidence of Berdimuhammedov's commitment to ameliorate Niyazov's ravages of Turkmenistani society.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Likewise, we judge Deputy Chair Yazmuhammedova's appointment as a signal for the start of a more modern and open model of managing cultural and media affairs. Again, habits of the past will change slowly and unevenly, but Berdimuhammedov is making the right moves. END COMMENT. End

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Comment.

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